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Cambodia's Anger

Cambodian Prince Sihanouk's outburst is directed at three principalities in Southeast Asia: Thailand, South Viet-Nam, and the CIA. Cambodia's quarrel with her immediate neighbors has a history of hundreds of years and the United States cannot fairly be expected to resolve a bitter traditional rivalry. But Cambodia's quarrel with the CIA has a more recent history and here the United States ought to be reflectively self-critical before dismissing Prince Sihanouk as a silly, angry young man.

What outrages Cambodia are rebel broadcasts directed against the country's regime from mobile transmitters reportedly located in Thailand and South Viet-Nam. Prince Sihanouk wants the United States to bring pressure against both countries in order to silence the rebel radios. If nothing is done, he asserts, then Cambodia will terminate all United States aid and turn to Russia and China for help and inspiration.

Prince Sihanouk has a penchant for extravagant language. Perhaps because his is a small country he feels that he must speak flamboyantly in order to compel attention. His threat to turn Cambodia into a so-called people's republic suggests not only his anger but also his deep pessimism about the chances of Southeast Asia resisting Chinese power. Though there is no menacing opposition within Cambodia, the Prince may well fear that, having helped to overturn one regime in Saigon, the United States may now be encouraging coups elsewhere.

It must be acknowledged that Prince Sihanouk has earned the right to be suspicious—especially about radio transmitters. In 1959, a United States embassy aide was expelled from Cambodia for providing gold and a transmitter to an opposition provincial leader. And the CIA has long tended to regard the nonaligned Sihanouk as a pernicious fellow—notwithstanding the stability and economic progress in Cambodia.

These old chickens should be knocked from the roost once and for all. It ought to be made clear again that the United States supports the integrity of Cambodia, without reservations. If the Prince wishes to terminate American aid, that is surely his business. But the United States should try to persuade the Prince once and for all that his country's desire to be left alone is understood and respected in Washington.